THE STORY OF A WALL STREET MONEY-DUEL AND OF MYSTERIOUS ADVENTURES IN THE WILDERNESS

THE KING OF NOBODY'S ISLAND

A Complete Novel Each Week in The Evening World

By Thomas Enright

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

John Douglass has cleared up a million dollars by shrewd speculation. He has also undermined his health by a systematic course of drinking. He is persuaded by Bruce, a Wall street magnate, to join a "pool." Bruce treacherously "sells out," and the bulk of Douglass's fortune is swept away. Douglass forces his way into Bruce's office and says: "You cold-decked me; I am going to wait my time; and some day I'll play 'dog eat dog' with you again." Returning home, Douglass enters his dining-room. As he is crossing the room he falls senseless to the floor. He has collapsed from nerve strain and dissipation. His doctor orders him to take absolute rest in the wilderness. Douglass engages George Clark, a half-breed Indian, as guide. With Clark and a forester named Kaufman he strikes deep into the woods. They reach the shores of a lake on whose central island is an unusually large cabin. The cabin's owner is a "man of mystery" who calls himself "Harrison," and whose beautiful daughter Mary has been brought up by him in a unique fashion. Harrison tells Douglass an odd story of her childhood.

CHAPTER IX.

(Continued.)

While the Road Was Mending.

"WHEN she was ten years old," said Harrison, "she went out one day on the Wildcat trail, the one you came in over. She was strong and healthy, and having little to carry, pushed on too far. Night fell and I grew worried. I had often warned her that if she was ever benighted on the trail never to try to follow it after the light had failed, but to camp where she was till morning.

"I was confident my instructions would be obeyed, but nevertheless I was worried. I took a bull's-eye lantern and went half way along the trail before I found her. She had stuck to the trail till the light grew dim, and then had made a little bed of balsam boughs and lay on it sleeping sweetly. The remains of her little campfire, and the bones of fish showed me that she had not fasted. Do you know what I did then?"

"Awakened her and carried her home, I presume."

"That was my first instinct, but I did not follow it. If I had showed her that I was frightened about her my fear would have been communicated to her. Possibly if such a thing occurred again, she would attempt to relieve my anxiety and her own fears by pushing on. So I came home and left her lying there. I knew it was all right. The next morning she returned full of her experience, and I praised her for her action."

"She is a wonderful girl," Douglass said, "and has had a unique education."

"She is, as I said, fearless and self-reliant—a perfectly normal child."

That evening after supper, when their cigars had been lighted, Harrison said to his daughter:

"Mary, you haven't sung for me for several days."

"I have been so busy with our guest and you, I haven't thought of it. I'll go sing to both of you now." Then to Douglass: "Do you want to hear me sing?"

"Yes, indeed, Lady Mary."

She ran lightly from the room and disappeared in the darkness. A little later her clear, sweet voice was borne to them from far out on the lake singing "Schubert's Serenade."

"She has the true artist's spirit," her father said when the song was finished, and then sighed a little. "It is her mother's blood; I believe the mother's blood is always predominant."

"I don't agree with you entirely; she has many of your traits."

Harrison looked at him strangely, and then said hastily:

"Traits, yes, but they are only imitations, not instinct. Her mother sang very beautifully and had the same artistic spirit which Mary displays in singing from her canoe instead of in the room. The mother's blood is predominant in us all for good or evil."

"I am not so sure of that; I have known bad men with good mothers."

"Certainly, but not many good men with bad mothers."

"Take my half-breed guide," Douglass said: "his mother, he tells me, was a full blood squaw, yet he has as little of the Indian in him as you or I."

"There are good squaws," Harrison replied. "And, again, you have had no chance to see the truth yet. Mark my words, his mother's blood is strong in him, and if the occasion ever arises when he is called upon to display it, you will see my theory justified."

Douglass laughed. "I hope it won't come," he answered.

That night as he reviewed the discussions of the day, Douglass told himself that his host was right about the money. Thoughts of money carried his mind back to Bruce. His animosity was waning in the novelty of changing scenes and the rejuvenation of his shattered body. Nevertheless he had promised Bruce that he would cry quits with him, and he had no intention of abandoning the idea. He decided that some time he would lay the whole matter before Harrison and see what his ideas were. He had views on most subjects; it would be interesting to know what he thought on this one.

He wondered what Harrison's story was. He well knew that there was something untold. On most subjects his host talked freely and frankly, but he had never mentioned the events which had brought him to the island, and Douglass, of course, did not broach the subject.

Also he thought of Mary.

CHAPTER X.

The King Starts for His Kingdom.

THE ten days that elapsed before George returned passed very quickly for Douglass. He constantly found new interest in his host, who showed a versatility of thought and action which was astonishing. Everything seemed to interest him, but his research and experiment never carried him to the realm of impossibilities. He was interested in abstruse problems, but spent no time in trying to square the circle. When he tired of his books and problems he went to his well-appointed carpenter shop and worked at anything that occurred to him, but he did not attempt to construct perpetual motion machines.

"There is much disappointment in attempting to solve or understand what lies beyond the limits of the human intellect," he said to Douglass, "yet those limitations are clearly enough defined. Wherever we find a wide difference of opinion among savants and scholars of all ages we may decide at once that no provable answer to the question on which they differ has ever been found.

"When a correct explanation of a certain matter, the rotundity of the earth, for example, is offered, we find that it is soon accepted universally. But when we review the question of the secret of existence and find a thousand jarring theories we may be sure no correct solution has ever been reached."

"Then you have no theory of your own on that subject?"

"No, I do not believe it is intended that we should know. If it were the wish of the Creator that I should be able to grasp the meaning of space and time, it would have been made clear to me. A limitation has been placed in every branch of learning and discovery. Up to this point thousands proceed, some rapidly, some haltingly, but they reach a bar at last, and from that point all efforts are abortive.

"In mathematics, for example, we go smoothly along, finding rules and solutions easily, and then bring up roundly at the quadrature of the circle. The more ambitious ones strive to go on, but they accomplish nothing. We study anatomy, we dissect the body and name all its parts and muscles; we know the functions of the heart, the brain, the blood—all these things ten thousand men learn and agree on, but the greatest student, the greatest scholar, can give no explanation of life itself."

"Nor of death."

"It is much the same thing; I think the most contorted idea of the ages has been, and is, the fear of death. It is as natural to die as to be born, and the fear arises largely from bad education and strained thinking. Properly attuned, man would look forward to dissolution with equanimity. I do not speak of violent or premature deaths—they are hideous, because unnatural. And after all, the worry and fear of death finds its own fallacy in old age. The nearer man comes to the end of his natural span the less he fears the end. I believe that often he comes not to abhor it but to feel the need of it."

"That is a consoling view."

"There is a greater and more consoling one—the plain, sound realization that it is all right. The birth and death of man are as natural as the budding and dropping of a rose. When the false and artificial fear of death comes to man he has but to say cheerfully, "It's all right; I know it must be all right.' To look on death without qualms is natural; to look at it otherwise is morbid. The very nomenclature is bad: 'the valley of the shadow,' 'the Stygian shore,' 'the worm and the winding sheet,' are all terms calculated to convey terror to the unphilosophical mind."

"And how has this view affected your daughter?"

"She is a proof of the theory. No superstition, morbidness or fear has ever touched her. I doubt if she ever thinks about it at all."

"Suppose you were to die, would it not grieve her greatly?"

"That is beside the question; we are not discussing the pain of parting from loved ones. If I left her for a year she would weep; if forever, she would weep still more—it is a matter of degree."

"My question was an unfair one, I admit. I would like to ask you another question. Do you think the world is growing better or worse as it grows older?"

Harrison straightened up from his work and said:

"Sir, it is growing better, slowly but surely. Its progress is gauged by the development of the human intellect. One by one the evils are dying out. We can look back a few centuries upon barbarities and horrors; to-day we find evils, but in a lesser degree. In centuries to come the greater evils will be remedied until a fair state of civilization is reached."

"Do you think the reformers are accomplishing much good?"

"They are accomplishing something, but not in the way they usually intend. They are educating the masses. The schemes and hopes which they promulgate for the sudden overthrow of evil are but a dream. To cure inherent evils and passions by laws and regulations is impossible. As I said, the development of the intellect alone can bring society to an ideal state. When the reformers point out clearly certain evils they aid in educating their unthinking brethren, and so much good is done.

"Take the question of undue accumulation of wealth, for instance; all the socialistic laws and schemes will prove inadequate until people learn to look upon the dishonest and avaricious man as a creature to be shunned, not envied. Reform movements are merely evidences, outcroppings of the intellectual advance—they are the visible proofs that we are progressing. To consider for an instant that they are the cause of advancement is simply to say 'the engine drives the steam.'"

"You think the time will come when avarice will be considered truly a vice and the rich miser shunned?"

"It is coming now," Harrison said, extending his hand and pointing across the lake. "Yonder in the world you will find it, in the books, in the hearts and tongues of a thousand wise men. The power of money is still great, but it is slowly dying. Men will some day know that enough is more wholesome than a feast. I have no patience, however, with writers and expounders who try to formulate plans for reducing all men to a dead level. We will always have our millionaires and our paupers. We can never set all intellects and all abilities to the same clock.

"The extremists, however, are legion; they are not content to attempt to keep men within their rights—they want to make them conform to a petty standard of mediocrity set by themselves. One would prevent me from accumulating money to gratify my tastes, another would have me eat no meat, yet another would bar me from amusing myself at a pleasant game played with harmless bits of pasteboard because men misuse cards by gambling with them. The principle in the last case is as if you said to me: 'The dove is a wicked bird; men wager how far and how fast it can fly.'"

Mary, who had been on a lone expedition, came tripping up the beach with her arms filled with flowers, lilies and wild roses.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

"We are discussing questions of state, Lady Mary," Douglass replied.

"Really! Well, I've decided that you're not to ask father for my hand."

"Indeed! Then I'll make war on you as soon as my standing army returns from clearing the trail."

"Splendid! He can chop down the portcullis and scale the battlements and rescue me from the ogre. Father, you will have to be the ogre," she cried, sitting on his knee and rumpling his hair until it hung about his eyes.

The two men laughed heartily and Harrison said:

"Why have you decided not to give King Douglass your hand?"

"He must do some gallant deed first; what have you ever done to earn such a reward?" she said to Douglass.

"Well, I killed two ducks, and I spilled you out of the boat. Can't we pretend that the two ducks were enemies and that I rescued you from a watery grave?"

She laughed merrily and flung her truant locks back from her eyes.

"No, that won't do, even for a make-believe. You must do something tremendous. Of course," she said musing, "the ogre might lock me up and you might come and steal me—I couldn't help it if you stole me," she said archly.

"Well, I'll leave you to discuss your plans," Harrison said, rising. "I've got some work to do. I warn you not to steal her, King Douglass; she is no end of a little shrew."

When he was gone, Mary sat looking smilingly at Douglass for a time, then she said suddenly:

"How old are you?"

"Forty."

"Oh, dear!" she sighed thoughtfully, and despite the little tug at his heart strings Douglass broke into a ringing laugh.

"You're always laughing at me," she cried; "you're an ogre, too. I don't believe you're forty; you act just like a big overgrown boy." Then, stepping quickly behind him, she rumpled his hair as she had her father's and ran laughing to the cabin.

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George returned that night and reported the trail clear.

"I've found a short cut," he said. "There's a creek that you can put into about half way across. I cut a path to it from the main trail."

"How long will it take us to go in?"

"One day. If we leave here early we will be at Lost Lake for supper."

Douglass reflected. He was loath to go; he realized that he wanted to be near these people—that he cared more for them both already than he did for any one back there in the world. He was beginning to enjoy life keenly, and he saw that it was partly because he was with congenial people. He was better satisfied with himself than he had ever been before. The selfish grind of his old life did not appeal to him.

As for the whiskey, he had come to realize that it had no part in his new existence. He wondered if the craving for it would return when he went back to town. He knew he would go back some day, but there was no hurry—he would not go until he tired of the woods. He turned to Harrison:

"I believe I'll build a cabin on Nobody's Island and be neighbors with you for a while," he said.

Mary began clapping her hands as soon as he had uttered the first few words, and when he finished she cried out joyfully:

"Oh, yes, please do, and don't go away for ever so long."

"You can easily do that," Harrison said, with a look of genuine pleasure on his face. "I have a man of all work who can help you. He is in St. Paul now, but I will send him over as soon as he returns, which will be in about a week. You will enjoy the work hugely, more than I can tell you."

"Well, it's decided; I'll do it."

"You must have a housewarming when you finish your abode," Harrison said. "This young mischief and I will come over and help dedicate the place."

As Douglass walked on the beach that evening reflecting on his plans the little forest maiden came quietly beside him, and, slipping her arm through his, walked with him.

"I'm so happy," she said, smiling up into his face. "We will enjoy having you near us so much, father and I."

He was touched, and a trifle embarrassed. He thrilled a little as he looked down into her beautiful, earnest face, for she was less a child than a woman now.

"It is really to be near you both that I am staying," he said.

She laid her other hand upon his arm and said again that she was happy.

"You are always happy, Lady Mary; you enjoy everything in the world."

"Yes, I do, I do. Father says it is because I am normal and healthy. I was never sick a day in my life. I love to tramp in the woods, to paddle my canoe, to work and to sleep, and, most of all, I love to talk and eat. Now you're laughing again."

* * * * * * *

Harrison and Douglass and George talked late that night of the plans for the new cabin. Harrison drew sketches and suggested ideas and made a list of tools they must be sure to take from his workroom. He grew almost boyish in his enthusiasm as they progressed, and Douglass entered into the plans with like spirit. Before they went to bed they had projected schemes and fixtures enough to cover an acre of ground, but that did not detract from the pleasure of the visions.

The next morning bright and early they took their leave. The men shook hands heartily and talked of their next meeting. Mary came up to Douglass quietly and said, "Good-by, I like you better than any one I ever knew except my father."

Then very simply, very naturally, she came close to him and turned her face up for him to kiss.

On the further shore Douglass turned and looked back. The white-haired man was standing with his arm about his daughter's waist, and they both waved their hands to him as he plunged into the forest.

CHAPTER XI.

Nobody's Island.

WILSON'S description of Lost Lake had interested Douglass, but it had not led him to expect too much. His observation had led him to believe that all lakes in this region looked pretty much alike, therefore exaggerated expectations did not mar his first view of it.

They came upon it in the evening. The canoe, winding along the devious course of the river, slipped quietly out upon its placid waters, and Lost Lake and Nobody's Island lay before them.

The lake was circular in shape and about a mile in diameter. In the centre was a little island, also circular in form, consisting of about ten acres of ground covered with a heavy growth of brush and giant trees.

The sun was just sinking behind the trees as they came upon the lake, and its rays, broken by the dense verdure, fell around the canoe in a million flecks of gold. There was no wind, not a ripple stirred the surface, and the dead sheet of water was like a great dark mirror set in a frame of green pines.

The guide stopped his paddle as they left the river, and they now lay motionless a few yards from the shore. The whole scene was to Douglass exquisitely beautiful and infinitely peaceful. He had noted before, since he had left town, how strange absolute silence is to the man who has never experienced it. We think some times, we of the town, that we know what silence is, but there is noise always. In the dead of night there is a constant hum; we cannot distinguish its component parts, we cannot tell even that it exists, but let it once stop and its absence would be keenly perceptible.

It seemed to Douglass now that there was in this overwhelming quietude some hint, some suggestion of the mighty power that swings the world noiselessly through space. The thought was dim, incomprehensible, born not of words, nor of logic, but of silence, and with a sense of self-abnegation he had never known before, he quietly, unconsciously bared his head.

The spell lasted but a moment. A tiny silver fish leaped joyfully near the canoe, and, as if that little splash were the signal to return to earth, Douglass sighed, and George drove the paddle into the water.

They reached the island just as dusk was falling. Douglass could scarcely wait for daylight to examine his domain, but was forced to content himself sitting in the little tent with George, making plans for the morrow.

At daybreak they were stirring. Axes and saws were laid out, a site for the cabin was selected, measurements were made, and with a will they set about clearing the space.

Douglass had decided to cut away gradually the trees and brush till nothing was left but a wall of verdure about the edges of the island. This would give him a circular park fenced around with the natural woodland growth. The larger trees they cut would serve for the cabin, the brushwood they would burn when the clearing should be large enough to make it safe to do so.

Following Harrison's advice, he gave himself no concern about the furnishing as yet, except to keep a list of things that would be needed, as they occurred to him.

The plans roughly formulated, they set to work. Douglass had made up his mind to have a part in all that was accomplished, and he swung his axe vigorously, careless of his blistering hands. The smaller trees they chopped down, the larger ones were felled with the two-handed saw they had brought in from Harrison's.

Douglass tugged and perspired at this instrument of torture until his back ached and his arms grew numb. But each day's work was easier than the day preceding, and now and then in the evening he rolled back his shirt sleeves and fingered the growing and hardening muscles of his arms with satisfaction. In a few days his hands ceased to blister and his back to ache.

While he worked he sang. It was not a very good song, nor was it very well sung, but it was a song, nevertheless, the only one that memory had retained from his impoverished youth. The half-breed soon caught the refrain, and as they bellowed it lustily together they kept time with the strokes of their axes.

The pile of notched logs grew daily, and the space in the centre of the island gradually widened. In ten days they made an estimate and decided that they had enough logs for a two-room cabin. Then they began "hewing out," shaping the logs flat for the floors. This proved a tedious job; making boards in a primitive way is a slow operation. There is nothing so precious nor so scarce in the woods as a board.

The task completed, they laid and propped their floors on the solid trunks which they had sawed to equal heights on the cabin site, and waited the advent of Harrison's half-breed, for they would need three men for the "rolling up."

He came the next day, and the walls began slowly rising. In two days the walls were up, and next the roof logs were rolled into place and the heavy work was over. It only remained to make the doors and windows and fireplace, then thatch the roof and the cabin would be complete.

Douglass walked around the clean, solid structure and admired it, then he went inside and admired it; then, coming out, he walked down to the beach and strolled carelessly back through the trees to see what the effect was when it burst suddenly upon the vision. From every point of view it was perfection. He felt very sure that there had never been quite as handsome and substantial a log cabin in the world before, and for him there never had been, for he had helped to build it with his own hands.

As they occurred to him, he made a list of the things he wanted, tools, nails, kitchen utensils, canned goods, bedding and a hundred and one things, and it was decided that George and Harrison's halfbreed, who gave his name as "Mac" and considered that as all sufficient, should go at once to Manitowish and fetch them.

"Meanwhile I'll exercise my ingenuity with such tools as I have and make some furniture," Douglass said. "How soon can you get back?"

"Three days," Mac answered, "if George he can go through the trails as fast as I can and carry as big a pack."

"George he can go faster than you can and carry a bigger pack," that individual modestly responded, and Mac grinned expansively.

CHAPTER XII.

A Warning.

GEORGE and Mac set out at daybreak of the fifteenth day on Nobody's Island. Douglass felt a little lonesome at first, but he knew the cure—he must keep busy.

The first day of their absence he constructed a four-post bedstead of straight, clean saplings, heaped it with balsam boughs and slept on it that night. The next day he made two chairs and hewed out logs for a table. The work progressed rapidly and well, and he admired his productions as much as he had admired the cabin.

He did not get very lonesome, for his tasks occupied his mind, and at night he was too tired to do anything but sleep. Nevertheless, he knew that if it were not for his work he would grow discontented in an hour, and even when he was fully occupied he knew that the presence of a companion, if only a half-breed, was a great boon.

There never yet was a man so self-sufficient, or so crabbed, that he did not feel the need of at least one companion. Two men might live on a desert island and be bitter enemies, and go about their tasks in silence, but take one away and the other would be very lonesome.

On the morning of the third day, when Douglass awoke, his first thought was that he was glad his men would be back that evening. When he had dressed he threw open his door and stood for a minute filling his lungs with the clean, pine-laden air. He decided that he would catch a fish for breakfast, and stepped back into the cabin to get his lines. As he did so his eye fell upon something lying on the door-sill.

It was a white envelope with the superscription upward. He stared stupidly at it. How in the world had it come there? For a long time he stood looking at it like Robinson Crusoe at the footprint in the sand. Then he picked it up. It was addressed to him in a scrawling, half-printed hand.

He turned it over and looked at the back, as if to gain some intelligence from that. Then it occurred to him that perhaps George had returned and left it there; but no, there was only one canoe on the beach, the one they had left for him.

At length he tore it open, and on the single sheet of paper it contained, in the same hand as the address, he read:

"You're not wanted here. If you are in the Manitowish Waters one week from to-day, you will never leave them alive. This means business."

He stared at the message in blank surprise, for there was no signature. It was a thunderbolt from a clear sky. He sat down to think the matter over calmly.

That some one had visited him in the night and thrust the letter under the door was a certainty. Who was it? He went over each acquaintance he had made since his arrival at State Line. Kaufman was out of the question; Wilson had reason for dislike, but this letter showed a plain desire on the part of the writer not to injure him but to drive him from the place.

If Wilson harbored resentment this would not be the natural way to show it. It could not be a joke or test from Harrison or his daughter—they were not that sort; George, he knew he could trust, and George could account for Mac. He turned and twisted the problem a hundred ways, but could find no solution.

Then he went out and examined the island carefully—no one there; he could find no clue to his nocturnal visitor. Returning to the cabin, he sat down and read the message again.

"It's no joke," he said; "people don't make trips at night to such spots as this for a joke. What the devil does it mean?"

He thought perhaps George could throw some light on it and decided to lay the matter before him on his return. Then he kept it from his mind as best he could and went about his work.

The two men returned just at nightfall; they opened the packs and soon all three were busy examining the contents. The pleasure of the operation was marred for Douglass by the matter on his mind, and George looked at him curiously once or twice, shrewdly detecting a change in his manner.

Douglass said nothing until they had had supper, and Mac had retired to the tent where the men still slept. George was preparing to do the same when Douglass called him, and taking the lantern from its hook handed it and the letter to him, briefly detailing the incident of finding it.

The half-breed read the scrawl with a surprise that left no lingering doubt in Douglass's mind as to his ignorance of the writer.

"What do you make of it?" the half-breed asked, handing it back.

"Nothing at all; I thought you might give me an idea."

George looked at him quickly. "You don't think"——

"Of course not, I'd trust you to the limit."

He looked gratified and began studying. Douglass knew that he was going over the same mental ground as he had himself traversed so carefully, and said:

"It wasn't Kaufman, nor Wilson, nor Harrison, nor you, nor Mac."

"No, it wasn't Mac, he was with me every minute, and he ain't that kind. He likes you and he's all straight. You can size a man up pretty well on three days of bad trails. I can't think of any one but that Wilson."

"But if he wanted to injure me he wouldn't give me warning; he could kill me from the trees and no one be the wiser. The writer of this simply wants me to get out, and wants that so heartily that he threatens to kill me if I don't go."

"Are you going?"

Douglass flushed. "Not by a damn sight," he said. "If I'd had my pack ready to leave when I got this note, I'd have begun pulling the ropes off."

"I thought so," George said quietly. "I'll be right here with you, and I'll keep my eyes open."

Douglass extended his hand without a word. If the blood of this man's mother was predominant, Douglass thought, there must be some mighty good traits about the Indian.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Spring Gun.

WITH a philosophical spirit which had always stood him in good stead, Douglass decided to make no change in his daily routine because of the warning he had received.

He argued correctly that the danger, if any existed, would not appear until the expiration of the time set for his departure. There was obviously no solution of the matter to be had, and he cautioned George to make no mention of the letter to Mac. He did not care to have the story go abroad; it might come to nothing, and if so he would not have it appear that he had been greatly disturbed.

So they went on with their work, and soon the interior of the cabin began to assume an air of completeness. Mac left them when the heavy work was done, but returned within a day or two with a load of books and papers, a gift from Harrison. He reported that Mary had asked a great many questions, and had been particularly anxious to know when the projected housewarming was to take place.

Douglass sent her a grandiloquent scroll, done on birch bark, with the great seal of Nobody's Island in the corner, informing her that his court would be ready to do her honor in two weeks. His real reason for delaying the invitation was to see what would come of his strange warning.

The seven days within which he was to leave the island came and went. The last day was a trying one; to say that he passed it without worry would be a ridiculous statement. A man who can face danger without fear is usually a fool; the man who does not know what fear is deserves no credit for his bravery. To be brave is to recognise danger and face it with determination and calmness, and Douglass faced the trying period bravely.

When the seventh day had passed he breathed easier. On the eighth day he began to laugh at his fears. "It was either a hoax or a bluff," he said to George.

George made no reply—his state of mind was not so easy, and while he kept his own counsel, he was greatly perturbed, for, unknown to Douglass, the seventh day had witnessed an event which had menaced him with death. It happened in this wise:

On the night of the seventh day, after the receipt of that mysterious missive, George, sleeping in his tent, was awakened about midnight by a thunder shower. He remembered that he had left his coat in the canoe, and rising, went to the beach to fetch it. As he returned toward the cabin, a flash of lightning threw a faint light on the door, and before it he saw something that made him stop short, amazed.

It was a rifle, set on two forked twigs, pointing straight to the door. He knew at once what it meant, and, walking carefully and quietly to the spot, he felt cautiously for the hammer and lowered it. Then running his finger along the trigger guard, he slipped off the twine which he knew would be there, and feeling his way, followed it to the door hasp. He detached the string, laid the rifle on the ground and pulled up its two supports. Then, with his bare toes, he obliterated the holes where the pointed sticks had been pushed into the ground. Then he returned to his tent, put the whole paraphernalia under his mattress, and lay down to think.

There was no question now but that the note meant business. The rifle had been so placed that when Douglass opened the door in the morning he would have been shot in the breast.

George was a heavy sleeper, and almost invariably was awakened by Douglass, who rose at dawn for a plunge in the lake. But for the providential shower, and George's trip for his coat, Douglass would certainly have been shot. The half-breed saw at once that they were being watched; that whoever had placed the gun there had been aware of this early rising habit of Douglass.

George slept no more that night, but lay turning the matter over in his mind, and debating what was best to do. It was clear that whoever this would-be assassin was he must have been hiding in the woods and watching them. After long consideration he decided that it would do no good to tell Douglass of the episode, though this had been his first thought when he obliterated the marks before the door and concealed the rifle.

The first thing to do was to find out how and where the midnight visitor had come to the island, and where he had gone when he had left it.

At dawn he took out the rifle and examined it; it was a new one of the small, wicked calibre known as 30-30. He drew the single long cartridge from its chamber and examined it; the bullet was of the kind known as "mushroom," that is, the shank was made of hard metal and the nose of soft lead. This form of bullet is particularly deadly. When it strikes an object the soft metal flattens out with the impact, while the harder portion remains unchanged, forming a "mushroom" shape which tears a great, ragged hole.

He replaced the gun under the mattress, and, pounding on the cabin door, called to Douglass that he was going out to look for a deer; then he took his own rifle and went to the beach. Before pushing off he examined the ground carefully and found what he expected, the mark made by the prow of a strange canoe. He paddled around the island—no other canoe on the lake. He now knew that the visiting canoe had either gone up the river or been pulled up the bank at some point. He was going to find that boat and its owner if he could.

When he had circumnavigated the island he found Douglass puffing and splashing in the water near the beach.

"You're out early, George."

"Yes, I heard a deer in the lake in the night. I'm going to find where he went out and get him."

"Good. A venison steak will just about suit; we're going to have company next week too."

George paddled away. He thought to himself that if Douglass knew of the company that had recently come and gone he would not be taking things so easy. He paddled to the bank and began slowly working around the lake, examining every foot of the shore. This took him until noon, when he returned for dinner.

"Find him?" Douglass asked.

"No, he didn't leave by the bank, he went up the river."

He ate hurriedly and started out again, this time working up the stream, examining both banks with a practised eye. He followed the stream until a mass of fallen logs and brush marked the end of navigation. Then he rested and cogitated.

He reasoned that the occupant of the canoe must have stepped out into the water and lifted the boat ashore, without leaving any visible traces on the bank. He paddled slowly back, watching the bottom for shallow spots, and he soon found what he sought, a shallow place with boot-marks in the clay bottom.

He tied his own canoe to a sapling and went quickly ashore in the direction the footprints pointed. He shaped his course through the tangled undergrowth along the line of least resistance. He knew from the character of the ground that the canoe could not have been carried far.

He soon found it resting on one end against a tree. He examined it carefully—no clue there. Then he took out his knife and opened it, intending to destroy the boat, but he paused, studied for a moment and replaced the knife in his pocket. Slipping quietly back into the brush he sat down, and sat there like a statue till nightfall. Then he went back to the cabin.

"What luck?" Douglass asked.

"Bad; I found his sign, but couldn't come up with him."

After supper George did some more thinking. At first he was inclined to tell Douglass the whole thing, but he had reasons of his own for changing his mind. The next morning he said:

"I want to go down to Manitowish for a day or two, if it's all the same to you."

"All right, I was going to ask you to go over to Harrison's in a few days anyhow and ask them to come over for a visit. I'll write Harrison a letter and you can carry it with you."

After a little silence he added, "I guess the wild man of the woods was a bluffer?"

"I don't think he'll bother you any more," George replied.

The next morning he started on the trail with the letter and his light pack.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Man in the Woods.

THE day after George's departure Douglass busied himself arranging and rearranging the interior of his cabin. He wanted things to look as imposing as possible when his guests arrived. As he viewed the disposal of his limited furnishings, and the appearance of the cabin, he said to himself that he had accomplished a great deal in a month. Here was a place of habitation, a good substantial one, furnished with all the necessities of life, where, four weeks before, there had been but dense wood and underbrush.

He sat down and figured the total cost—George's work, Mac's work, the things that had been purchased at Manitowish—all less than $200. He laughed as he footed up the figures; he could live here a long time on what Bruce had left him. A million isn't so great a necessity after all.

Then his mind wandered back to his old life; he wondered how long it would be before he returned to it. He thought of the half-sick, indifferent way he had gone through each day, mistaking apathy for calmness, and taciturnity for thought.

He stood up straight and filled out his chest. Then he bared his arm and felt the good firm muscles. He looked in the mirror at his eyes—clear and bright, not red and heavy as of old.

Physically there had certainly been a great improvement, and having approved of that change, he grew introspective. What had been the mental effect?

(To Be Continued.)